

Turkmenistan: Dissident's Family Allowed to Leave

Ends 13-Year Travel Ban

(Berlin, June 9, 2016) – [Turkmen](#) authorities dropped a 13-year travel ban against three family members of an exiled dissident, Pirkuli Tanrykuliev, allowing them to leave the country on June 4, 2016, a coalition of human rights groups said today. Tanrykuliev's daughter, Ayjema Rejepova, and her two daughters, ages 3 and 11, were able to fly to Turkey, where Tanrykuliev's wife awaited them.

The Turkmen government has arbitrarily banned several thousand people, including relatives of imprisoned or exiled critics of the government, from travel abroad to intimidate them and punish their family members. At times the authorities have turned the family members away at the airport or physically removed them from flights.

“Finally, after more than 13 years, Pirkuli Tanrykuliev's family can be together,” said [Rachel Denber](#), deputy Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “We hope that the Turkmen government will end its practice of arbitrary travel bans, so that other families can experience this same joy.”

Tanrykuliev is a retired doctor and medical school professor, and a former member of Turkmenistan's Parliament. He was imprisoned in 1999 to silence his outspoken criticism of the government and prevent him from running for parliament again. He was freed in 2000, and eventually given asylum in Norway. President Gurganguly Berdymukhamedov of Turkmenistan, who is a dentist, was one of Tanrykuliev's college students.

Soon after Tanrykuliev's arrest, Rejepova and her husband were fired from their jobs. Law enforcement and security services subjected them to surveillance, periodically interrogated them, and tried to intimidate them. They were also banned from leaving the country.

In July 2015, Rejepova and her two daughters were barred from boarding a flight for Turkey. A migration services official told them they were banned “for life” from leaving the country, and their passports were stamped and signed “exit banned.” In summer 2014, Tanrykuliev's brother, Doly, age 71 at the time, was removed before take-off from a flight to Turkey. He suffered a stroke soon thereafter, which his family felt was a direct result of the stress from the episode.

After the July incident, Rejepova filed an inquiry with the migration services about her travel ban. She received a written reply only after the November visit to Ashgabat by United States Secretary of State John Kerry, who had been informed of the ban. The reply, dated November 20, 2015 (on file with Memorial Human Rights Center and Human Rights Watch), merely stated that, “in accordance with findings by relevant government agencies, restrictions on your travel remain in force.”

Human Rights Watch, Memorial, and the Prove They Are Alive campaign, an international coalition to end enforced disappearances in Turkmenistan, along with other independent human rights groups, have raised Rejepova's case repeatedly with European Union officials, in the context of the EU-Turkmenistan Human Rights Dialogue, and of discussions around the [EU-Turkmenistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement](#). During its May 17, 2016 human rights dialogue with the Turkmen government, the EU “[encouraged Turkmenistan to permit citizens to travel freely in and out of the country](#).”

Human rights groups had also [urged](#) US officials to raise her case in their bilateral discussions with the Turkmen government.

On April 6, 2016, Rejepova once again wrote to the State Migration Services asking for an explanation of the legal grounds and duration of the travel ban, and which agency had imposed it. In mid-May, she received a reply stating that neither she nor her children were subject to any travel restrictions. A source close to the family said that Rejepova was so surprised by the written reply that she went in person to the State Migration Service to receive oral confirmation.

In September 2015, Turkmen authorities also allowed [Geldy Kyarizov](#), a prominent horse breeding expert who fell out of favor with the government, to leave the country, after banning him numerous times from foreign travel. The authorities allowed his teenage daughter to leave a week later.

Freedom of movement is guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Turkmenistan ratified in 1997.

“Allowing Rejepova and her children to board the plane is the only right thing for the authorities to have done,” said Vitalii Ponomarev, Central Asia program director at Memorial Human Rights Center. “Turkmenistan’s international partners should continue to consistently remind the Turkmen government that freedom of movement is a fundamental right, and urge the Turkmen government to end all its travel bans and allow those on the ‘black lists’ to travel abroad.”

[Source](#)